

VZCZCXRO6894
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHKB #1182 2221325
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 101325Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1009
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNOSC/ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN EUROPE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 001182

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/10/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: OPPOSITION EDITOR DETAINED, REPORTEDLY
SENTENCED IN HASTY TRIAL

Classified By: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION JOAN POLASCHIK PER 1.4(B,
D)

¶1. (SBU) On August 9, Shahin Agabayli, the editor of a small opposition newspaper, was detained, apparently to compel his appearance in court. Agabayli had failed to appear in court to defend libel charges brought against his paper, Milli Yol, by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). Embassy sources indicate that Agabayli may face two separate libel lawsuits: one from the MIA and one from former Deputy Speaker of Parliament and current Member of Parliament, Arif Rahimzade. MIA spokesman Ehsan Zahidov told the press that Baku's Nisami district court ruled on August 3 that Agabayli must be brought to court "by force" after Agabayli ignored several court summons.

¶2. (SBU) According to press reports, during the evening of August 9, Agabayli received a phone call from an anonymous source requesting a meeting. Agabayli agreed, and upon arrival at the determined location, was arrested by plain-clothes police officers. Parvin Kazimzada, a Milli Yol correspondent, had accompanied Agabayli to the meeting but was not detained. Agabayli was reportedly taken first to a police station, then to the Organized Crime Unit (OCU) detention unit. Local journalists were unable to confirm Agabayli's detention, and rumors circulated throughout August 10 as to his whereabouts.

¶3. (SBU) While we still have been unable to definitively confirm Agabayli's whereabouts as of 1700 on August 10, the editor of a widely-read opposition newspaper told us that Agabayli was found guilty of libel and sentenced to one year imprisonment following a hastily organized trial on August ¶10. The trial reportedly was not for the MIA lawsuit, for which Agabayli evidently was detained, but for the lawsuit filed by Rahimzade. Our contact also reported that Agabayli's lawyer was not present during the trial.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: While the full details of this detention still are emerging, the MIA libel lawsuit against Milli Yol represents the latest in a string of GOAJ libel lawsuits against pro-opposition newspapers. Viewed in conjunction with a series of physical attacks on journalists, this points to a worrying up-tick in pressure levied on journalists. An analytical report on media trends over the last six months will follow septel.

¶5. (C) BIO NOTE: Prior to founding the Milli Yol newspaper, Agabayli served as deputy of the Gray Wolf party. Although now small and irrelevant, the Gray Wolf party had immense power in the early 1990s - which peaked when Albufaz Elchibey became President in 1992. Due to a conflict with Gray Wolf Chair (and former Minister of Interior Affairs) Iskender Hamidov, Agabayli left the party in 2005. He ran as an opposition candidate in the 2005 Parliamentary Elections, against the powerful Rahimzade, and according to Embassy sources, harshly criticized Rahimzade during the campaign

period.
HYLAND